National Highways Authority of India also provides ambulances at a distance of 50 Km. on each of its completed stretches of National Highways under its Operation & Maintenance contracts.

(x) Widening and improvements of National Highways from 2 lanes to 4 lanes and 4 lanes to 6 lanes etc.

Apart from the above, on the recommendation of Committee on infrastructure (CoI), a Committee was constituted by this Ministry under the Chairmanship of Shri S. Sundar, former Secretary of the then Ministry of Surface Transport to deliberate and make recommendations for setting up an effective and dedicated agency for Road Safety and Traffic Management. The Committee had submitted its report. The main recommendations of the Committee, *inter-alia,* include creation of National Road Safety and Traffic Management Board through an Act of Parliament. The Board would have advisory as well as regulatory functions. Under regulatory functions, the Board would set standards for the Motor Vehicles and set standards for designing of roads. In its advisory role, the Board would assist Central Government in the matters relating to road safety and traffic management and would promote road safety research, road user behaviour strategies, lay guidelines for establishing medical care and rehabilitation, etc. Enabling provisions have been made for creation of similar bodies State level.

Impounding a Foreign Ship

4682. SHRIMATI MOHSINA KIDWAI: Will the Minister of SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Merchant Shipping Act, 1958 enables the Indian Government to impound a ship registered in a foreign country when there is a death due to negligence or murder of Indian sailors in such ships;

(b) if so, in what manner Government assure that our sailors get due jusice whenever any serious physical injury or death comes to their notice *suo-moto* or is specifically brought to their notice; and

(c) whether the provisions of this Act are adequate to protect interests of Indian sailors or any amendment is required?

THE MINISTER OF SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) Any accident including the death or injury to any seafarer of any nationality on board a ship registered in a foreign country while the said vessel is on or near the coast of India can be investigated by an officer appointed under section 359 of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1958. During the course of investigation, the vessel or its crew can be detained for the purpose of conducting the investigation. However, if the death is due to any criminal act such as murder, the relevant provisions of the Indian Penal Code/Criminal Penal Code would apply and the Merchant Shipping Act, 1958 does not have any provisions to address such issues.

(b) In cases where an Indian seafarer gets injured and dies on a foreign registered ship while the vessel is a high seas, it is the jurisdiction of the respective flag administration to conduct investigation into the cause of such accident or criminal incident. The Government of India, being a substantially interested state, however, has also now started participating as an observer in such investigation wherever possible. Further, whenever feasible, the Indian Embassy/High Commission officials are deputed to investigate the matter in the first port of call in the foreign countries.

(c) The Merchant Shipping Act addresses the subject of protecting the interests of Indian sailors through its various sections. However, to further strengthen the existing provisions, the following additional measures have been initiated by the Directorate General of Shipping.

(i) Recruitment and Placement Rules, 2005 have been notified to regulate various manning agents who employ Indian Seafarers. This notification requires mandatory registration of such manning agents operating out of offices registered in India. This has ensured that manning agents, who employ Indian Seafarers on Indian as well as foreign registered vessels, are held accountable for the welfare of such Indian Seafarers.

(ii) A psychometric test has been introduced at the entry level of officers in maritime training courses, which will help in determining his/her attitude and aptitude for the sea. It assists the entrants in taking corrective measures to mentally prepare themselves for the rigours of a life at sea.

(iii) The Directorate General of Shipping has also given wide publicity in leading newspapers with regard o the scheme of recruitment through the registered Recruitment and Placement Shipping Agents for employment in the marine sector.

(iv) A new course module has been formulated to sensitize the trainees with regard to the rights of seafarers as laid down under the Merchant Shipping (Recruitment and Placement) Rules, 2005 in all the Pre-sea Training Institutes.

(v) The matter has also been taken up with the International Maritime Organization (IMO) with regard to consolidating the international conventions with regard to shipping casualties and making the law stringent to bring around the non-responsible flag states to carry out their responsibility.

(vi) MS Notice No. 5-A has been issued by the Director General of Shipping. This notice requires mandatory reporting and plan of action to deal with causalities involving Indian seafarers on foreign flag ships.

Upgrading the Ports

4683. DR. K. MALAISAMY: Will the Minister of SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Singapore and Hong Kong Ports alone handle more traffic and freight than all the Indian Ports put together;

(b) whether it is a fact that if India wants to intensify the process of integration with the global economy and relies on trade to drive growth, ports would be a critical link in the chain;

(c) if so, the initiative taken to convert the 10 minor ports in India to the rank of Major Ports; and

(d) the progress of action taken in each minor port?

THE MINISTER OF SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) As per information available, Port of Singapore or